

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please AMEND claims 15 and 17, as follows. For the Examiner's convenience, all claims currently pending in this application have been reproduced below:

1. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask comprising:

a light shield film and openings formed in said light shield film,

wherein the openings generate near-field light in response to receiving light incident thereon, wherein the generated near-field light is usable to expose an exposure target with the near-field light,

wherein the openings formed in said light shield film comprise two or more parallel rows of first slit openings each having a width smaller than 100 nm, and two or more parallel rows of second slit openings each having a width smaller than 100 nm, which extend perpendicularly to the two or more parallel rows of first slit openings, and interlinking at least two of said rows of first slit openings, comprising means for forming a plurality of discrete, spaced apart latent-dot-image formed areas, spaced apart from each other along two perpendicular directions on an exposure target in response to each of the first and second slit openings receiving polarized light having an electric field component parallel to the two or more parallel rows of first slit openings.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask according to Claim 1, wherein the width of each of said second slit openings is equal to a width of said light shield film positioned between two adjacent first slit openings.

4. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask according to Claim 3, wherein the openings formed in said light shield film are configured and positioned to generate near-field light in a square dot pattern on an exposed area of the exposure target.

5. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask according to Claim 1, wherein a plurality of the two or more parallel rows of second slit openings are arranged at a predetermined interval.

6. (Previously Presented) A near-field exposure apparatus comprising:  
a near-field photomask according to Claim 1;  
light illuminating means for illuminating said near-field photomask with polarized light, which has an electric field component parallel to said rows of first slit openings; and  
means for positioning said near-field photomask at a distance from the exposure target within a near-field region thereof.

7-14. (Canceled)

15. (Currently Amended) A near-field photomask for forming a latent image on an exposure target by generated near-field light by receiving exposure light, said photomask comprising:

a light shield film for constituting a light shield portion and openings formed in the light shield film, wherein the openings comprise first slit openings having two or more parallel slit openings lengthening in a first direction and a second slit opening lengthening in a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction, wherein the second slit opening interlinks the first slit openings, and wherein the latent image is locally formed on the exposure target only in discrete regions at which the second slit opening crosses the ~~first slit openings~~ light shield portion by receiving polarized light having an electric field component parallel to the first direction.

16. (Previously Presented) A near-field exposure apparatus comprising:

a near-field photomask according to claim 15;

light illuminating means for illuminating said near-field photomask with polarized light, which has an electric field component parallel to the first direction; and

means for positioning said near-field photomask at a distance from the exposure target within a near field region thereof.

17. (Currently Amended) A near-field photomask for forming a latent-dot-image on an exposure target by generated near field light by receiving exposure light, said photomask comprising:

a light shield film for constituting a light shield portion and openings formed in the light shield film, wherein the openings comprise two or more parallel first slit openings lengthening in a first direction and a second slit opening lengthening in a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction, wherein the second slit opening interlinks the first slit openings, and the latent-dot-image is locally formed only in discrete regions on the exposure target at which the ~~first slit openings cross the~~ second slit opening crosses the light shield portion in response to the ~~first slit openings and the~~ second slit opening and the light shield portion receiving polarized light having an electric field component parallel to the first direction.

18. (Previously Presented) A near-field exposure apparatus comprising:

a near-field photomask according to Claim 17;

light illuminating means for illuminating said near-field photomask with polarized light, which has an electric field component parallel to the first direction; and

means for positioning said near-field photomask at a distance from the exposure target within a near field region thereof.